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Don Jaeger, President, Alfred Jaeger, Inc.

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Interview with Don Jaeger

(President and CEO, Alfred Jaeger, Inc.)

by Katina Strauch (Editor, *Against the Grain*)

In all the time that I have known Don (has it been almost twenty years?), I haven't known him to ever lose his temper or his sense of humor. He says his philosophy is to enjoy what he's doing, and I think that comes through loud and clear! — KS

ATG: Don, your business is to supply libraries with back volumes of journal titles that they want to keep on hand in the library. What's business like for a back volume vendor in this time of electronic whizbangery?

DJ: Not bad, just different. I've been in the business long enough to remember some parallels. Back in the 70s, microfilm was the rage. And in the 80s it was CD-ROM. Now fulltext and document delivery are replacing hardcopy. Our job as a business serving libraries is to keep tabs on demand and know what librarians want. Some titles are more frequently used than others. We are finding that libraries have a more focused demand for more current materials, say in the past 3-5 years. They use document delivery to supplement their collections for the less frequently used titles, but they still want to buy titles that are in high demand. Usage is the key.

ATG: What sorts of trends are you observing? And can you tell us in what subject areas the demand for back volumes is the heaviest?

DJ: That's obviously based on several factors — the institution, the subject areas they collect in, the life of the journal, the space available, the circulation and the currency of the information. Computer and technology journals have a three year life, but then the arts, social sciences and history titles can have demand back to a twenty-year scope. We are no longer antiquarians, but rather collection development specialists. We no longer buy our stock thinking we will keep it for a few years before we sell it. We buy journals that are selling and will sell and keep those in our inventory.

We are seeing digitization projects at places like Harvard where they have digitized certain portions of the collection and made this available locally as well as online to libraries throughout the world. It's the era of resource sharing. It's too soon to tell if libraries will keep hardcopy of those titles that are digitized. We obviously aren't familiar with the long term ramifications of the technology. We have to change with current and future demands.

Some publishers are cutting down on their print runs, and we are actively purchasing titles that they aren't keeping. We are basing our purchases and collection on current demand and will try to fill from the inventory we have as well as from select publishers whose titles we are servicing. We inventory over 40,000 titles and thousands of others through the publishers and the secondhand market

ATG: How do you buy things? And how has the Internet changed your life?

DJ: We cultivate good working relationships with the libraries,



publishers, and individuals we work with. We like to get desiderata lists and we are flexible enough to pay by check or credit. Back volume dealers generally pay the freight. Of course, when April 10 rolls around, there are individuals who want to donate materials to libraries and they want a receipt for tax purposes. We can facilitate that process. We have helped local universities in New York, as well as libraries in the West Indies and China by donating excess inventory.

In addition to inventory and publishers, individuals, professionals and libraries selling their excess collections are viable sources to locate materials. This is a good outlet for us to obtain materials for our clients in addition to the publishers. This really is a fascinating field to be involved in. It's getting to know genuine people in the field that makes the job a lot more interesting whether I'm at the office or attending library conferences. We deal with all kinds

of libraries and each library is unique.

We are on the Internet and have a homepage <<http://www.ajaeger.com>>. We are working to give libraries access to our company and are looking for ways to expand the number of title inventories available to people online. People are asking for more access and we are making information available as it is cost effective. Obviously this is more timely than our printed catalog.

The Internet has definitely expanded the marketplace. We used to deal with one person (the director) or the serials (periodicals) librarian, or the acquisitions librarian (for the one-time purchase), but now libraries are changing their focus and concentrating on functionality. We might get a call from an architectural bibliographer who wants to purchase all types of media in that particular subject area. Instead of going to one person, we can go to 30 or 40 subject bibliographers. Computers have greatly expanded our ability to deliver access to our products.

ATG: How many people work for you?

DJ: Helen and Judy are the key managers in sales and systems respectively. Joe and Wayne run the whole warehouse, including collators, order clerks and receipt people. We also have customer service people who support our outside sales reps. It's a dynamic, changing workplace. We can't be static; we can't sit back and say we are doing things well. I will never stop making sales calls myself. I want to assess the market myself, renew old friendships,

make new friends, gear our services toward current needs.

I wish I could predict the future. All I can say is that it is dynamic and changing all the time. Publishers right now derive a high percentage of revenue from the hardcopy journal. Until they focus on the electronic journal as a revenue-producing product, the hardcopy will still be in demand. As there is change in the marketplace, we will change and get involved with other media to keep our product line and services current.

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ATG: How did you come to be in this line of work anyway?

DJ: Let's see. When I was 13 my Dad, Al who had started the business, took me to 23rd Street where the business was located and had me sweeping up and working with people in the warehouse. It was the early 60s and I liked earning some extra money. I used to fool around and say my father was a "bookie". I knew he dealt with books. But then I learned about ISSNs, frequency, continuous publication, subscriptions. I pulled orders, collated material, learned publisher names, about shipping and packing, international shipments, that sort of thing. As I got older, I drove and picked up volumes from libraries and other locations in the City. It was interesting. I remember we'd have all sorts of visitors — foreign and domestic — coming to the office and coming to our home on Long Island. It was exciting to me learning about all the different international cultures and regions. And I definitely learned what a serial was!


ATG: How did your father get into this business?

DJ: He worked for Walter Johnson, a former periodicals dealer, back in the 1940s after World War II. He learned the business that way. In the mid 1950s he decided to go out on his own and start a landscaping business. For seven months in the spring and summer, Dad would work in Nassau County and then he would invest his profits in back volume journal collections. He eventually established an office on 4th Avenue in New York. In 1958 he decided to sell the landscape business and go into the back volume business full time. 303 4th Avenue was the old address. Now it's Park Avenue South. It wasn't a luxurious surrounding by any means. We had inventory, phones, a place for people to visit and see the journals. In the early 60s, we moved to 23rd Street around the corner. I remember moving the journals myself on flats to the new facility. (I was 14 or 15). That experience all came in handy when we moved to Long Island. We had about 3000 square feet of inventory back then. Now we have 40,000 square feet.

ATG: Where did you grow up? Give us some background on yourself.

DJ: I grew up in Nassau county, New Hyde Park — on Long Island. I went to public school before I went to college in Massachusetts (Nichols College near Worcester) where I earned a business degree. (Those were my only 4 years of out of NY state living!). I remember the same day I graduated, after the ceremony, I headed to Boston for a Special Library Association meeting so I was pressed right into service.

I have two sons — **Bryan**, who will be 13 in October, and **Scott** who is 10 1/2. They are good friends when they want to be. I am the oldest of three kids (have a brother and a sister). I had an idyllic family life. Our parents took an interest in the Little League, inter-scholastic sports, even La Crosse and ice hockey, and music lessons.

I love sports and still occasionally play hockey with the "Pops." I play golf when I get time off. I like to travel preferably on pleasure, but do a lot of business travel. I have fun watching the kids pursue their interests. Bryan is into ice hockey and Scott is into acting and baseball. The kids keep my wife Susan and me busy. I come back to the office on Monday for a rest! 

And hey y'all! At ALA in New York, Don had a good friend, **Michael John Horak**, at his booth who has written a book, *The Evil Side of a Race Track* (Rainbow Press). It's about harness racing. If you missed seeing Michael in New York, I'm sure you could hook up with him now. Try Don at <jaeger@ajaeger.com>.

Trip to Alfred Jaeger, Inc. during ALA Annual

by **Katina Strauch** (Editor, *Against the Grain*)

On July 9th, 1996, the last day of the American Library Association Conference, **Alfred Jaeger, Inc.** sponsored a tour of their facility in Commack, New York. A luxury coach met us at the Javits Convention Center in New York City around 10:00 that morning and took us out to Long Island to the Jaeger facility by a little after 11:00. Upon arrival we were ushered into the large white brick building where the staff greeted us and led us to the conference room where coffee, tea and pastries were being served prior to our tour. President & CEO **Donald Jaeger** greeted us and gave us a preview of the different areas that would be covered during our tour. It was decided that to most effectively cover all areas the attendees were broken up into three groups. One for the front office, one to the sales office and finally the third group would go to the warehouse.

In the front office, **Judy Lanzer**, the manager, discussed certain aspects involved with the day to day operations of the Jaeger company including accounts receivable and accounts payable, want lists, claims submitted to both publishers and vendors and certain ways accounts are tracked on their automated system. Next we went to the sales office where sales manager, **Helen Protasewicz**, gave us some insight into how orders are followed from inception to completion and how the customer service staff is able to follow up orders systematically from an online calendar. Regarding status of customer orders, the sales department checks with service staff of publishers throughout the world for price and availability information. It was also interesting to meet the inhouse staff we had met over the phone! The third stop on our tour was the warehouse, where co-manager **Joe Romano**, took us through the paces of processing material for shipment. He showed us the process of order pick slips that come to the warehouse from the sales office for warehouse personnel to process from stock. After the material is pulled from stock a checker will make sure the material is complete as ordered and then move the material to the shipping area. In the shipping area we found the many diverse ways which the Jaeger company can send material. Domestically UPS is the preferred carrier and internationally air freight companies such as DHL and Federal Express. In addition, they use motor freight carriers such as ABF and Yellow Freight and Consolidated Freight Ways for larger shipments within the US and Canada. It was also interesting to see how material purchased from libraries and individuals is laid out in the warehouse and collated into inventory. Many questions were answered by the Jaeger staff within the three departments and all of us gained valuable insight into how back volume orders are serviced.

Our last stop was a demonstration of the **Alfred Jaeger, Inc.** homepage illustrating pictures of the operation and key personnel as well as select policies and order forms. In addition, there is a current title list of stock that is searchable including the necessary forms to order selected material. At around 1:30 the bus took us to the nearby Sheraton Hotel where we were served a delicious luncheon in the large atrium of the hotel complete with waterfalls and beverages. An hour or so later, we returned to the Big Apple. I'd like to thank Alfred Jaeger, Inc. for sponsoring such an educational tour and for the opportunity to further our knowledge of such a unique operation.